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5:Simpson N-5 (1939) 1940 SS16 Pemon SS16
Kamarakoto
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Fig. 1 — Typical Kamarakoto Settlement.

Uruyén seen from the east. In the foreground is the edge of a forest, in which farm clearings are made. Beyond the buildings of Uruyén is the Aichá River, flowing from left to right. The trees in the right background follow the Yuruán, the confluence of which with the Aichá (white with reflected light on the water), is seen to the right. In the left background is the upper end of the Kamarata Valley, with its various small sabanas, and in the right background above the sabanas are the two lower terraces of Auyán-tepúi.

Uruyén is located on a small, flat sabana, the Uruyén-tai, in the middle of Kamarakoto on the south side of the Aichá River. The sabana is a terrace, which breaks down abruptly about two meters to the low-water level of the river and the buildings are near the edge of this terrace, above normal high-water. The Yuruán, a perennial tributary flowing from Auyán-tepúi, joins the Aicha at Uruyén on the opposite side. Above this, on the Uruyén side, there is an embayment in the terrace, apparently an old meander of the Aichá, which formerly held a deep pool of water in which uruːyi fish were common. This had some influence in locating habitations here and gave the name Uruyén to the site. The uruyis have all been killed off at this locality and the pool is now a mere marsh at low-water, although flooded in the rainy season, but the other advantages of the site cause continued occupation. A short distance from Uruyén to the south and to the east there are forests and the farm patches are made in these. The site has been occupied since before the memory of living men and there are traces of older dwellings that have been destroyed.

There are now seven buildings standing at Uruyén, but two of them are completely unused. The nature of the buildings may be tabulated as follows:

Type of building	Materials: Roof	Materials: Walls	Use
A. Elongate: parapan.	kunwada-yarɛ.	maripada-yarɛ.	Principal dwelling. Reyes and family.
B. Rectangular shelter: wata-imedapun.	kunwada-yarɛ.	(none)	Work-house for A.
C. Circular: waipa.	kunwada-yarɛ.	maripada-yarɛ.	Partly abandoned and in disrepair but used as a work-house for B and for visitors.
D. Elongate: parapan.	kunwada-yarɛ.	mud (non).	Dwelling, Claudio and family.
E. Rectangular, with walls, "calabozo": wata-timeakɛn.	kunwada-yarɛ.	mud (non).	Used as a "calabozo" in the rainy season and for visitors.

While we were camped near Uruyén as many as forty Indian visitors were sometimes present at Uruyén at one time and every structure there was crowded with hammocks, including the wall-less B, although Kamarakotos dislike sleeping without walls, but even under this pressure no one occupied F or G or used them for any purpose.

Food

The Kamarakotos will eat practically everything available in their region from which humans can extract any nourishment, but their main reliance is on agriculture. Wild food, plant and animal, plays a valued part in their diet but its failure is not fatal. Cultivated plants are the staple foods, and their failure means starvation. Contrary to the general impression, it is extremely difficult and precarious to live off the country in the tropical jungles and sabanas. The Kamarakotos must be classed as agricultural Indians.

Plant Foods and Farming.

Wild plant food is relatively unimportant and forms only an insignificant addition to the Kamarakoto diet. At least four non-poisonous mushrooms are known and eaten. I did not hear of any wild roots or seeds that are commonly eaten. There are a few, surprisingly few, wild fruits that are enjoyed in season, including the fruits of the maripa and moriche palms, called aba? and kwai respectively, and several sorts of guamos, pods with a sweetish edible pulp surrounding the hard seeds (warwoto, maipa, abira), and the algarrobo (wadé) with somewhat similar pods with a powdery edible substance around the seeds. These with a fruit called madé that I did not identify are almost all the wild plants that provide food.

Cultivated food plants, on the other hand, are numerous and varied. Some plants, food and otherwise, are generally planted more or less at random around the houses, notably gourds, cotton, and pupu (a shrub with spiny leaves and a fleshy fruit that looks like a golden-yellow tomato). Agriculture, properly speaking, is carried out by a system of mixed, temporary farm-patches, a wasteful and inefficient type of farming that has been taken over from the Indians and is common throughout Venezuela where such patches are called "conucos."

The Kamarakoto conuco, uma, is invariably located in the forest, but usually near its edge. The reason for this is that the forest has become established wherever there is rich soil leaving only the poor, sandy soil open and grass-covered. At Uruyén the to?-esa?, Reyes, in an unusual experimental mood, cleared a patch of sabana and planted cassave[107] on it, but when we left

107 [see footnote on p 119, category 116 - Analyst]

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242 the experiment seemed to be a failure, the soil being too poor to grow a crop. In this vicinity the sabanas are generally on alluvial terraces, dry and sandy or pebbly, while the forests are on rich soil mainly of decomposed igneous rock.

241 To prepare a conuco, the brush and trees are cut down, the brush piled and burned and the trees, which do not entirely burn, left where they fall (see [462] Fig. 13). This work is done entirely by the men, who use steel axes and machetes for it. Planting is also done by the men,[108] but the scanty cultivation and all the harvesting is done by the women. Casave is planted in hills usually roughly alined and other plants scattered around, with the casave or separately, more or less at random (see Fig. 14).

A conuco is ordinarily abandoned after one year although some products, like bananas, continue to be gathered as long as they bear without further attention. For casave and annuals a new patch is cleared every dry season.

[262] Casave is the staff of life and of course occupies the greater part of the conucos. Chile peppers, of which there are many kinds, are also indispensable and bananas, also varied, perhaps come next in importance. The following plants, including a few not used for food, were seen growing in the several conucos examined in Kamarata:

Casave.
Yams, (etc.). Dioscorea, at least three varieties.
Ocumos, Xanthosoma.
Sweet Potatoes.
Bananas, at least six varieties.
Plantains, at least two varieties.
Squash.
Sugar cane.
Papayas.
Watermelons.
Corn (only one variety seen, but two or three said to occur).
Chile peppers, at least six varieties.
Peanuts.
Black beans.
Pupu (see above).
Cotton.
Tobacco.

[224] Kumi (a plant not eaten but rubbed in cuts for luck in hunting).

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177 All of these plants are rather surely pre-Columbian in this region, and probably also in this tribe, except bananas, plantains, sugar cane, and watermelons. There seems to be room for a slight doubt regarding bananas and plantains. They are generally believed to have been introduced by Europeans, but if so they spread rapidly and far almost at once after the discovery of America, and spread ahead of the actual penetration of the Europeans. Wild

108 [see footnote on p. 319, category 116 - Analyst]
[text continues on p. 125]

Swimming.

526 The men and, particularly, the boys are very fond of swimming and [481] spend hours in the water. They paddle and splash around hilariously. It is pe- [147] culiar that when seriously attempting to go anywhere in the water, they swim below the surface, staying under as long as a minute and crossing any of the streams in Kamarata (up to perhaps twenty meters) without coming up for breath. The stroke is a rather formless but effective paddle. They tread water and remain at the surface in deep pools with ease, but I never saw them progress on the surface for more than one or two strokes. This is pure conjecture and not entirely probable, but it almost seems that they have learned swimming by imitating fishes and that it has not occurred to them that they might swim and breathe air at the same time.

Drunkenness.

273 Their herculean drinking bouts have been mentioned in connection with the dances that usually accompany them. Their alcoholic drinks are weak enough to require considerable perseverance in order to become drunken, but at these long parties most adults, men and women, do eventually achieve this [514] condition. Such a party becomes disgusting, from any sober point of view, particularly as vomiting is an expected interlude between rounds, but at the one [578] bout that I attended it did not become seriously disorderly. It is the highest tribute to Kamarakoto character that even with the whole crowd irresponsibly alcoholic, there was no quarreling, no abusive or even particularly noisy language, and that as much courtesy and thoughtfulness persisted as was at all con- [857] sistent with their condition. Children of all sizes attended and were not neglected but had an equally hilarious time without drinking.[228]

[152] Such excesses have their aftermath and the only time that I saw the Kamarakotos surly and cheerless was the day after a week of carousing, when all were suffering severely and had lost interest in life or the neighbors.

Incendiarism.

157 A curious practice not mentioned in previous pages is that of setting fires 372 in the dry season. The dry grass of the sabanas then becomes highly inflamma- ● 311 ble and the Indians delight in firing it, just to see it burn. Some tribes do this, ostensibly at least, to drive out animals when hunting or as a means of signaling,[229] but the Kamarakotos have, and give, no other reason than they enjoy 372 setting and watching the fires. Flying over the country in this season, rings of 311 fire can often be seen on every patch of sabana and after a party from the Caroni left us we could see columns of smoke in that direction for two days. The forest

228, 229 [see footnotes on p. 333, category 116 - Analyst]

372 is probably not purposely fired, but it sometimes becomes dry enough to burn
● 311 and catches from the sabanas. Thus there is a large, gaunt, burned forest high on Auyán-tepúi, where no Indian ever goes, and others were seen in similar situations between Kamarata and Luepa. This custom has had a detrimental effect on the beauty of the region, which is of little import to the Indians, and on the pasturage of the sabanas, which is of still less — both points of some potential interest for the prospect of the opening up of this region.[230]

230A [see footnote on pp. 333-34, category 116 - Analyst]

171 escape the clear evidence that many Caribs did eat human flesh and hence, in
266 any acceptable definition of the word, were indeed cannibals. It is evident that this was seldom or never a regular item of diet but took place under definite, ritual circumstances, and it is probable that it was never a universal practice common to all the highly diverse Carib tribes. The question is academic here, since the Kamarakotos and their closer allies certainly never eat human flesh now and have no memory or legends of such a practice.

15 224. This and the contrary statement regarding the Indians are supported
114 by the expert opinion of my wife, Dr. Roe, who is a clinical psychologist.

155 225. It would not be proper to expand or to argue these statements here,
191 but it should be added as confirmatory evidence that among allied Indians who
158 have been in close contact with missionaries of various sects there are occasional clearly neurotic tendencies and cases.

364 226. We later saw Taurepanes, under much stronger "civilized" influence,
177 living in dirt such as would not be tolerated by a Kamarakoto.

122 227. Kamarakoto women did our washing during our stay and got it as
296 clean as a laundry would, although with some extra wear. That their own clothing was usually rather dirty may, indeed, have been due in some degree to their spending so much time on ours.

273 228. It seems, moreover, certain that the sexual excesses said to accom-
288 pany Indian drinking bouts among other tribes do not occur here.

202 229. The Kamarakotos use no means of signaling, by drums, fire, or
[61] otherwise. They told me, with evident admiration, that traveling parties of
[484] Arekunas (i.e. any of the Indians closely related to the Kamarakotos but not recognized as belonging to this tribe) communicate advance notice of their number, destination, and time of arrival by setting fires, but that they do not know this art. Travelers confirm the use of fire-signals among allied tribes, although the Kamarakotos may have exaggerated the extent and explicitness of such messages.

171 230. This practice of burning the sabanas is as common in northern
372 Venezuela as it is in Kamarata and is pursued even in Caracas, where it is a
● 341 source of much annoyance and some real loss and danger. Is it possible that this very unfortunate Venezuelan habit is another heritage from the Indians? In the cattle country it is rationalized by saying that it improves the pasturage (but Pittier has shown that the exact opposite is true) and reduces the number

171 of ticks (which is highly doubtful), but the same thing is done where it is obvious-
372 ly and wholly harmful and there is little doubt that this is merely attempted
311 rationalization of an essentially irrational custom.

272 231. This[1] belongs to the colonial level in the sense that it was invented
273 in colonial times to deal with a colonial introduction of new foodstuff, but to
176 the aboriginal level in the sense that it was a purely Indian invention without
177 direct European influence.
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177 232. Of course this[2] may be a modern introduction in this tribe, but it
235 belongs generally to the colonial level.

178 233. This instrument[3] and its unchanged survival are emphasized because
534 in many tribes the flageolet, or similar flute-like instrument, was definitely
199 modified under European influence, but the Kamarakotos retain the purely aboriginal form.

114 234. As discussed elsewhere, some students believe that these[4] belong to
343 what I here call the colonial level, but I believe them to be aboriginal.

000 235. I do not speak here of the strictly religious aspects of this work, matters of opinion which it is not my business to discuss. Regardless of their own intentions, the work of missionaries always has widespread results also in the non-religious sphere which may legitimately be studied and evaluated quite aside from belief in any creed. These results are sometimes admirable, but it is an open secret that they are also sometimes deplorable. One may share the opinion that it is better to believe in Christ than in kanaima and still believe that it is better to retain native skills than to be taught to depend on insecure importation.

Similarly in speaking later of how little the Indians have to gain from the process of "civilization," religion is entirely excluded from the discussion and no judgment of its value to the Indians is implied.

236. These and the other suggestions made are not theoretical abstractions. Examples of impoverishment by the contrary policy can be cited not only from Venezuela but also from every country in the Americas.

123 237. Some reluctance was encountered but every person whom I asked
126 finally accepted. In the midst of operations, when all scruples seemed to have been conquered, the tribe suddenly and unanimously refused to be measured any more. On investigation, I finally learned that this was because the English numeral "eight," which I had several times called out to my wife or to

1 [i.e. the cane press - Analyst]
2 [i.e. chickens - Analyst] 3 [i.e. the flageolet - Analyst]
4 [i.e. square shelters - Analyst]